

CONFESSIONS OF A WIFE

MEN ARE ADJUDGED GUILTY BEFORE THEY ARE HEARD

Little book, sometimes you should be glad you have no eyes. There are some sights that wound the heart so deeply the scar never heals. One of these sights confronted me as I pulled myself together at the door of the life-savers' tent.

Everyone had been sent away except the physician, the nurse and the men who were working at the water-soaked inanimate thing that had once been Malcolm Stuart.

Dick stood at the foot helping the nurses, but his face in its cold marble whiteness told me nothing. "Don't you hurt him," was my first exclamation as I saw them try to make him breathe by artificial means.

"You had better not stay here," said Dick in a monotonous tone, but he did not look up, neither did he stop for one instant his efforts in helping to resuscitate Malcolm.

I don't think I had ever realized Malcolm Stuart was so handsome, little book, until I saw him lying there so helpless. His beauty was terrible. His staring brown eyes, from which that wondrous smile had fled, the whiteness which made his tanned arms and hands uncanny, seemed to protest against death.

I thought of our dear companionship during the summer, of his tender sympathy and understanding. "He loved me," was my sobbing cry under my breath. "He loved me and he is dead."

Then came the superstition that makes one ask in times like this, "Was it because it was wrong to love me that he has been punished? Will my punishment for loving him be that I must go on living with Dick, dragging this dead secret about with me?"

I looked up to find Dick's eyes upon me and in them was such a strange expression. It was as if he were

mutely asking me not to judge until he could explain.

I returned his glance coldly—what was there to explain? The man to whom I was married, had let the man I loved die, had cowardly turned tail and come back and left him out there in his struggle.

Why had he done this? Certainly not from any hint of jealousy, for as far as Dick was concerned he was absolutely ignorant of anything except the merest acquaintance between Malcolm Stuart and me.

By a perverse fate they had never met until that day. Dick knew nothing about the letters that had passed between Malcolm and me. Certainly he would be the last one to believe his wife had listened to words of love that very afternoon from the man whom he had let die without making any effort to save.

"Yes," I said to myself wonderingly. "he did start to save him and then he deliberately turned around and came back." I had thought many things of Dick, but I had never thought him a coward. Indeed, much as I hated him at that moment, great as was the contempt in my heart for him, as little as I could understand his motives, I could not think that the man who was trying so hard to bring back life to the man he had let die was a despicable coward.

And yet—there could be no explanation. Since the world began the only difference between man and brute was that man came to his kind in time of need and the brute let his kind die—alone.

Why then had Dick done this? By what twist of the brain could he ever justify himself to himself, let alone to me.

"It was too bad you did not see him, sir," said one of the lifesavers. "You might have held him above water until we got there."